



We proudly present the inaugural issue of Obra/Artifact, the literary journal of Stetson University's MFA of the Americas!

Our selected nonfiction writers explore the dichotomies between coastal urban America and its heartland, leave their children's grief on the pristine beaches beneath the Andes Mountains, and traverse the surreal jungle of a post-modern Thailand. Their fiction counterparts engage in a cycle of life and death as interminable as it is irresistible; their moves through the many stages of a lived journey take us beneath reality's inherent liminality in a series of incisive flashes. Our first issue concludes in the expanded field and its attendant poesis, where the world recreated in prose collapses in a codified collusion of context and containment. We sincerely hope that you enjoy.

-The Editorial Staff, Obra / Artifact

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Essais nonfiction

JANITOR CLOSET

Ian Moore
/ "Islander
Ashore"

"Ships coming from a distance carry everyone's dreams ashore. For some they slip in with the eddies of the tides. For others, they crash against the rocks of poor fortune. Each brings their new song of freedom, coming to America."

Zora Neale Hurston

When I first visited New York in 1981, stumbling over the stacks of garbage on the corner of Fifth Avenue, I was amazed by the cloying coexistence of poverty and wealth. I later discovered that the city was going broke, that New Yorkers were betting on the city's demise. Years later, when I flew into San Francisco, I was greeted by quite the opposite spectacle. My wife's sister picked us up in her 500 SL Mercedes and ferried us through a kaleidoscope of dazzling billboards advertising everything from gambling in Reno to humanitarian aid in Darfur. I was deposited by my in-law at Lake Merritt, the pride of Oakland's American-African bourgeoisie. I had to pinch myself to believe the opulence was real.

It was real. The American-African community of Oakland, California, is probably one of the richest Black communities in the world. The skyline houses that look down from the redwood hills of the East Bay are not the exclusive preserve of whites, as is often the case in many neo-colonial lands. The sun-drenched Mediterranean climate is host to one of the most diverse communities in America. Yet beyond the mortar and bricks of their homes, American-Africans own very little of the wealth of this fertile region.

On my arrival in Oakland, I learned that the city was scorned by the city on the other side of the bay. Oakland's population used to be more than sixty percent American-African, but that number has now shrunk by almost half. The racial tag has stuck, and Oakland continues to be subjected to insinuations of second-class citizenship. This abuse only serves to highlight the cruel irony of history; Oakland was the celebrated start of the Trans-Continental railway, which was built to bring Easterners to the gold of the Sierra

Mountains. The fame of the whoring town of 'Frisco had spread too wide for the truth to be known—that San Francisco was just a stop-over on the way to far more rewarding adventures elsewhere.

It was not, however, until I began to work with Americans that I got to see the people behind their facades. Stripped of a reason to care, people often don't. Settled people become addicted to their immediate gratifications and their interest in others becomes disturbingly absent. The "perfect lifestyle" of the American public persona is a veneer that fools nobody, least of all someone new to the country eager to dig beneath the surface. American lifestyles are so tied to credit and debit—and an obsession with crime—that to come to America is to feast on dreams of fabled opportunities and harsh, demoralizing realities.

My first encounter with real Americana came after I pounded the streets for a month looking for a position comparable to that of an engineer, which I'd been in London. I was told by an agency interviewer in no uncertain terms that as a black man I could not hope to get a position that would allow for vertical mobility.

American racism strikes foreigners with such bold frankness that, on first impression, it comes as a relief from the hypocrisy of the British class system. Yet the acceptance of conflicts among racial groups in America is so prevalent, and reveals an attitude of such bitterness, that it chokes every fiber of the nation's structure with its mutual detachment. Nowhere in the world is disdain for one's fellow citizens such a basic part of the typical psyche.

Most startlingly, it is an attitude of victimage. Trying to explain the thousand-year-old war between the Scottish and the English to an American-African is to be reduced to absurdity. American-Africans pride themselves on being history's biggest victims, as if no other group—of any color—could possibly have suffered as much.

I was finally saved from the grip of this consuming racism by the guiding hand of patronage; in the land of the brave and the free it's not what you know, but who. A cousin of my wife just happened to be on the local school board. He found me a job as a janitor at a junior college, where I eventually worked for four years.

In the course of my apprenticeship, I was exposed to American supervisors who took more than two years to summon the nerve to have a conversation with me beyond "What's 'appenin'?" It took me some time to realize that, as a black Englishman, I frustrated the majority of Americans I met because I didn't fit neatly into any of their boxes.

The confusion I was causing reminded me of when I first filled out a visa form to come to the USA. I had to grapple with questions of my grandparents' ancestry and religion, and whether I, or any of my distant relatives, had committed a crime for which we weren't convicted. Finally, what was my race? I resisted this attempt to be made into a racist as long as I could, but I was impelled by the attitudes of American bureaucracy to view myself in this one-dimensional manner.

My accent set me apart, and my attitude really seemed to upset my supervisors. In social interactions, too, the accent drew attention. I found myself subject to a wide range of responses: people staring at me, mouths agape, people storming out of the room, muttering "who is that nigger," women approaching me and asking me to "just say som'thang." The former I lost no sleep over. The latter I learned to live with.

After these teething-times of acculturation, a process that everyone goes through in learning another culture, I was swept up by the vibrancy of American-African life in Oakland. The bubbly familiarity of American-Africans is an intoxicant to the newcomer, particularly when that newcomer has come from a European tradition that considers any display of emotions to be uncivilized. For a black man who had lived in isolation and cultural persecution in England, America represented a land flowing with milk and honey.

Seeing prosperous black people strolling the streets was enough to get my heart pumping with feelings of pride and self-worth. The daily acknowledgment of American-Africans for each other in the streets introduced me to a brotherhood I'd not known before. The encouraging expressions of warmth in the language instilled an emotional bond that resurrected my wounded soul. It seemed to me that the American-African world of the East Bay was just a kiss away from paradise, yet as a black individual who had also traveled and lived in Africa, I found my assimilation into American-African culture difficult.

Firstly, it seemed to me that America bound all people of color to its knee-jerk fight for survival, without necessarily knowing what was in the best interest of a given individual. This has left American-Africans blind to a global consciousness and other alternative solutions to individual liberation. Throughout the world, people of color understand that they are the victims of myriad discriminations. It is understood that those who do the discriminating (The Man, The Whites, Them, etc.) are themselves robbed of the one thing they seek to take from us—humanity. When American-Africans play their game of hate and bitterness, they deliver up to their oppressors that which they seek, and ensure their own slavery. Thus, when American-Africans use derogatory words to describe each other, they are not inventing a unique cultural language; rather they are propagating the language of slavery.

Nothing disgusts a cultural African more than to hear an American-African refer to himself and his kinsman as a "nigga." This is no solution; it is a papering over of the pain of humiliation, a sublimated denial of the self as a deserving, feeling, human being. It is also not a solution when educated American-Africans mimic ghetto-speak to impress their friends with just how "street" they are. It seems to me that respect and love for oneself has to be the number one priority for any people. For a people that has been enslaved both physically and mentally, respect and love must be pursued as a religious commitment.

I found it difficult settling into the American-African world because I made the mistake of thinking America would be just like Britain (People speak English here, don't they?). For a foreigner, Ameri-

ca's unique culture defies international social norms. While most countries are united by the sameness of their people, ideas, religion and character, America defines itself—and is defined by others—by its diversity. The Anglo-Saxons may still control the American corridors of power, but the pulse of the nation is in the explosive diversity of its streets. The innovative American culture that resonates around the world is not found in its politics, but in the vibrancy and freewheeling creativity of its people. Such is the magnet that pulls the brave and courageous from around the world to these shores where everything is possible. Nowhere else in the world is there such a belief that with hard work and luck, an average person can live a rewarding and materially successful life. On arrival ashore, the islander is suspended between the dream of freedom—a freedom that offers credit to everyone involved in the scheme of things—and the reality of slavery, a slavery that compels conformity to debt.

April Vazquez / "Hand Me Down Death"



Walter was a transplant to the area, a northerner who had retired to the mountains several years before. He and his wife were outsiders in that close-knit community. The way they looked—the wife's outlandish floral prints and oversized belts, Walter's unruly hair and eyebrows—was unusual, as was the way they talked. Not just the accent, but also the casual profanity that peppered their speech; they were the first people I'd ever heard invoke the name of Jesus without

his friend and neighbor, Walter.

ever seen anyone like them, and most people avoided them altogether. My grandparents, however, were always kind to the couple. For years, they met for lunch every Friday, and after his wife left Walter that winter, my grandparents continued spending time with him. He had no other friends or family nearby.

As they drove up the mountain to the family cemetery after my great-grandmother's funeral, my grandfather turned to my dad.

"I saw her," he said. "Last night. She came to me in a dream."

I can imagine my grandfather saying these words: his swollen hands on the steering wheel, his thinning red hair faded to golden, his pale green eyes watery with age. His body, still as solid as a tree trunk, was stiff with arthritis and an old shrapnel wound from World War II. You could see the soreness when he walked. I was surprised, years later, to discover that he was only 71 when he died.

"She told me she'd see me soon," my grandfather went on. "I want you to know that I'm ready to go. I've made my peace with God."

This conversation, which my father related to me afterward, stands out in my mind because less than a week later my grandfather was dead. Walter, the friend who had stood beside him at his mother's funeral, shot him to death in his own living room for no reason that anyone has been able to surmise in the twenty-three years since. He also killed my uncle Robert in his home, and his own son-in-law, Mike, whom he shot in front of his three children-Walter's grand-children. He then drove home, called the police, and sat calmly on his front deck, waiting.

When I google my grandfather's name, all that appears online is a list of addresses: people who still live on the road named for him, rental properties, houses for sale. My grandmother, whom Alzheimer's reduced to a piteous, child-like state in her last years, is gone. My aunt, who witnessed her husband being shot to death and escaped only because Walter stopped to reload, has never remarried. I don't know what became of the three kids. Walter hanged himself in jail with an Ace bandage the next day.



The marvelous is always beautiful, everything marvelous is beautiful. Nothing but the Marvelous is beautiful.

-Andre Breton, "Le Manifeste du Surrealisme,"

Poet Ezra Pound wrote, "The age demands an image / Of its accelerated grimace." Dare we mention that Professor Silpa Bhirasri (AKA the Florentine sculptor Corrado Feroci who emigrated to the country in 1922) inspired the modern art movement in Thailand, and was himself inspired by his homeland's fascist movement? He played a key role in what became Silapkorn University, Thailand's first university focused on the visual arts. He wasn't alone in re-visioning Buddhist iconography or juxtaposing Western art-historical styles with indigenous content.

Dali is the predominant influence, his portrait at Bangkok's MOCA showing the artist at his easel. He is painting a subject that turns out to be the viewer; a mirror has been inserted into the canvas. At the foyer to the men's room in the Promenada Mall, there are Dali-influenced paintings on the wall that feature superhero figures. Thais seem to admire the Spanish painter's showmanship as much as his skill. Like Breton, they believe "the Marvelous" is always beautiful.

A triptych of a Buddhist Heaven, Hell and Middle Earth contains the world; Michael Jackson is even in there. Few of the artists are known outside of this country even as "The American Century" ends and intellectuals speculate that our multi-polar world has pivoted away from them. The artists work in oil, acrylic, gold-leaf and other mixed

media. For some, the medium is the hands. "Thailand: A Surrealist Mural" is a fever-dream.

The vegetation is baroque and uncontainable; flame-trees singe the retina. The song of the gecko ascends the scale and everything sweats and is eroticized. Soi dogs collapse in the noonday heat—one curls up in an ice bucket—but they're nocturnal roamers, either in pairs or alone, reverted to their wolfish atavism. Gated hounds howl in the night, while alley cats mewl like infants or lovers. The mural's multiplicity is excess and collision, hybridizing old and new. Tin shacks abut a high-rise construction site. Tourist hotels give way to a shadowy soi lined with massage parlors where they ask, "Where you go, mister?" and tug at your sleeve.

Some of them ride their motorbikes side-saddle. It's either a brazen teenaged attitude, learned from childhood, or perhaps it's the power of karma and good luck in Theravada Buddhism. In any case, it serves just as well—if not better—than Western rationalism, which terminates in The Bomb. The mural is roughly the size of France and a bit smaller than Texas. It has the cultural subtleties of the former and the hubris of the latter. When the doors of the sky open, the monsoon clouds appear as they are: infinite.

The frozen clouds are by Rene Magritte. The glyphs are by Joan Miro. Since this mural is not static, other styles move in. Traditional Thai modes of expression and an eroticism that is less Egon Schiele and more cartoon canonization of the Thai Goddess-Maiden. Representations of female pulchritude are abundant: Pimpilalia, the lovely woman two men vie for in Thai classical literature, is everywhere. Male gazes salivate.

Consonant with them is the Buddhist-Hindu iconography that

worships the female form even as it lionizes the patriarchal warrior tradition. There are figures of bloody, hair-bedraggled she-wraiths crawling on all misshapen fours, floating in air, lurking in AC vents and haunting school dormitories, hotels, homes—all those domestic and institutional spaces the West regard as "safe"—exacting revenge on male murderers and abusers of themselves and their children through stabbing, decapitation, drowning, disembowelment, crucifixion, meat-grinding. When Frida Kahlo said, "I paint my own reality," rebuking Breton's claiming of her as a surrealist, she may as well have spoken for these Thai artists, since the ghosts of iniquity and historical brutalities haunt their canvas and its mythologized kingdoms.

The mural's weather is a surreal second skin. During the burning season, the nostrils and lungs are parched and the eyes smart. The mountains disappear behind haze—a surrealist magic trick. During a monsoon, the sky pours slanting sheets of rain that clatter corrugated tin. Rain disturbs the turbid waters until the moats turn a coppery color. After the heat, the rain is alms.

Tradition favors the colors of teak and bamboo, but the new canvas is splashed with turquoise and sea-green, palm and white sand, crimson and mauve. There are the hallucinatory neons of Bangkok in lurid Technicolor. The mural is indeed a fever-dream, shot through with the flashing lights of motorbikes. The mural is a saturated and high-contrast world, and the LED bulbs that illuminate the tented food stalls are unsparing. Nothing is hidden, though perspective is multiple.

The Maya Mall changes colors at twilight like a chameleon. A blue and green seascape can look like a Mark Rothko color-field, or a lonely woman in a blue-shadowed restaurant of low-slung tables and pitched lanai roofs could be painted by Edward Hopper. The

escalators of Kad Suan Kaew Centre seem a shadowy and uninhabited modernity, just as the bellboy who approaches you from the shadows on that same horizonless floor is from "Overlook Hotel." A rooster brood forages under a billboard advertising condos on Huay Kaew Road. In the field behind them, under an outspreading tree, is an angular shack where humpbacked water buffalo roam free. Bangkok elites squabble over these lands with farmers of the north.

Guesthouses and vegetarian bicycle cafes grow, feed undiminished optimism that groups of Şers̄'thī hīm tourists from mainland China will continue to arrive sunhatted and selfie-sticked to allay their anxiety about too much leisure time. Tuk-tuks and songtaews, motor-bikes and cars flow in an endless stream. A dusty shop window displays an antique opium scale and another, designer handbags. The average monthly wage for a Thai worker is 13,500 baht (approximately \$385), so the displays at Maya Mall are mere diorama of luxury commodities, rare and beyond reach, where modernity has met Thailand with a dictated smile.



The first beach resort in Thailand. Centaura Grand Beach Resort & Huahin Villas Way Inn.



Several months after the landslide, we left the Andes and took a bus to the coast. We spent two days at an Ecuadorian beach town called Ballenita, meaning 'little whale,' named for the humpback migrations offshore. I smiled at the Spanish diminutive for an 80,000-pound behemoth, understanding that the term expressed affection.

We checked into a small hotel propped up on a bluff above the ocean. The children ran to the terrace to look for whales. We saw gulls and dinosaur-like frigate birds, but no sea creatures. The next morning we went to the beach, a half-moon of salty, peppered sand arcing between outcrops. We hiked to one end where we could be alone.

I leaned against a rock, carved a nest out of the sun-warmed sand, and pulled out a thin mystery to read. The children moved to the edge of the rocks to dig and play a game. After a while I looked up to see them kneeling in a circle around something on the ground.

"It's a shark," Nick said gruffly over his shoulder.

Luke looked up at me. "It's dead."

It was the carcass of a gray, several feet long and mostly intact. The jaws were open as if in a final gasp, its double rim of pointed teeth chomping at the thin air. Its eyes were flat and gritty like sandpaper. The skin was torn in spots where sand fleas jumped and flies touched down on exposed tissue that reeked of rotting flesh. I felt a twinge of sympathy for the creature, once sleek and swift, fierce and free, now victim of an overwhelming force of nature. A foot away, Stina had begun to dig a hole.

"We're going to bury it," she said. I went back to my rock, lifting my head between paragraphs and plot twists to check on their progress.

They dug all morning, starting over when they thought they were too close to the sea, arguing about how deep was enough, lengthening the hole because the shark wouldn't bend. They found a plank to serve as a bier, and the three of them slowly lowered the body into the hole, plucking leaves from a tree and layering them over to hide the creeping decay. They covered the corpse with sand and leveled the grave, running their small hands over and over the top until it was smooth as suede.

I felt a weight settle on me, but perhaps it was due to the tone of the mystery I was reading, a dark one, or the pillow of gray pushing in from the sea. A few drops fell on the page, and I looked up at the cloud above. I realized that for no reason at all, they were tears. I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand, checked on the kids still immersed in their work, and moved on to the next chapter.

Stina went to the water's edge and gathered broken shells. She outlined a square over the grave and wrote "Here lies Mr. Shark" with the white fragments. Nick and Luke gathered sticks and stood them on end, affixing a horizontal piece in the shape of a cross. Next to it, they set bunches of green seaweed and a blue bit of fishing line they found on the surf.

Stina led the ritual with a solemn tale about Mr. Shark's life at sea. "But for every fish, or whale, or shark there comes a time," she concluded, "when it takes its last journey." We stood in silence, heads bowed. No one spoke the names of our loved ones lying beneath a mass of mud on the other side of the Andes, nor of our loss. No one asked why we never went back. In bed that evening, I realized the children had done what I could not: they had buried their grief.



Imagi<u>N</u>ação fiction

When I was born, my uncle and father went on a five-day drunk. Everyone was happy, and the men could celebrate. The government made my parents wait twelve days before registering my birth, a simple way of lowering the infant mortality rate.

When I was born, my father's business sold American candies to the children of Guantanamo. He went to every house in the neighborhood giving candies to the children and liquor to the men. My mother tried to dissuade his sweets and liquored generosity, but understood that it was expected of him.

When I was born, we lived with my paternal grandparents. A tall, thin grandfather that played the violin, and a short grandmother that smoked cigars. They had ten children, dad being the eldest.

When I was born, my mother stayed at home. All the women came to visit not with casseroles, but with rice, beans, and roast pork. They said I looked healthy and strong, and that I'd grow into a fine young man. No one mentioned my difficulty breathing.

When I was born, my uncle said that I would need two cribs: one for my body, and the other for enormous head. My uncle always reminds me that he thought I would never grow big enough to support that head.

When I was born, Castro was on the move, inciting the countryside with his eyes set on Havana. It would take him two years to get there. My family was not impressed.

When I was born, my sister was not impressed, either. Daddy's little girl asked if he had gone on a five-day drunk when she came into the world. No, that's a ritual reserved for when boys are born, she was told.

When I was born, my sister piled up all of my cloth diapers and pissed all over them.



Oscar Medrano / "Dirty Diapers"

L. N. Holmes / "Forceplay"

I played the theme song for Star Wars on my cornet in the middle of the woods. My sister accompanied me on flute. The melody ricocheted off the nearby tree trunks, creating a symphony from our duet. We performed half of the piece before Dad started revving the chainsaw, the sound of metal teeth biting through a fallen hardwood swallowing our glorious anthem of a galaxy far, far away.

My sister and I walked back to the truck parked on the trail, balancing our instruments on the lids of worn cases. We sat on the open tailgate and watched Dad work. He squatted among the autumn leaves, the chainsaw handle parallel to his thigh. Sawdust confettied the air. Slices as big and round as tires were lopped off the trunk. As payment for clearing fallen trees for farmer friends, Dad was



allowed to take the wood and sell it. It kept our refrigerator humming, along with the nightshift job he worked.

When the saw ran out of gas, my sister and I vaulted off the tailgate and resumed our performance. My mouthpiece felt like an ice cube pressed against my lips. I progressed a little too far ahead of the beat, my sister too far behind. We stopped and yelled at each other, my sister brandishing her flute

like a police baton. Dad shouted at us, but we acted like we couldn't hear him over the wind.

Later, my sister was Leia and I, a female Luke. We darted around trees, shooting phantom enemies. We ran into each other, provoking a brawl that disregarded the dark side. Dad was too occupied with his saw to pull apart the crooked limbs of his nearby daughters.



"Hunting"

There was a grading system, one with rules. It had to be followed. This is what my mother always said about her English classes. Every student earned what she deserved, no more, no less. No extra-credit. No late papers. Daughters

hunting I started out with an A. By the time my father flipped over the kitchen table it was an F. My mother often talked about students who dropped her classes. The broken sugar bowl, saucers, and glasses were evidence of an even worse than failing grade.

"Goddamn it!" My father's yell was slow and loud, like the PA system at school. I heard him in my head at night.

"Clean up this mess!" he roared, and I did, which moved the day to a D. Not failing, because at least I was doing something. The broom gripped in my hands, I pulled the invisible shell I'd made years ago over my head. Who knew what else would fly around? Cutlery. Phone books. Lamps. My sister Eva cried and shook in her high chair, her face shiny with snot and tears, the metal legs of her

chair rattling as my father stomped around the room, boom, boom. Now his hands were on the shelving unit, also metal. I could hear the screws loosening from the wall, the screaming creak of the back being torn away. Back to F. I pushed the broom over lumps of pottery and a spoon.

"She's just a child," my mother cried.

But I'd tidied up before. I knew how to make sure the glass was picked off the floor before Eva walked across anything with her bare little feet.

Every day, my mother tried to not do the wrong thing, but this morning, she'd dropped her briefcase and her books on the kitchen table while my father was reading the newspaper. Her leather case and Twelfth Night were the objects that started everything. Worse, she was going to the college, leaving my father home with us. Eva was sick, and I talked too much, said the wrong words, the things that made my father's hands fly out and slap me.

Those were F seconds, leading to F hours, sometimes days, especially the ones where my mother was at a conference and left us home alone with him. Last time, my father whirled like a tornado through our bedroom, ripping our beds off their frames and tearing our clothes off their hangers. My older sister, May, ran away to my Aunt Jane's house and stayed there. I imagined her days were always at least B-pluses. We weren't allowed to see her.

The metal cabinet groaned and plunged to the floor, crashing and spewing salad bowls, placemats, and punch glasses. Eva screamed. I clutched the broom, closed my eyes, felt the power of my parent's bad marriage in my bones, the hate pumping as fast as my heart.

My father was a blind dinosaur, a wild boar, a wooly mammoth, the kind from the books at school. He hulked through the kitchen banging and whapping into my mother's body, sending her flying against the basement door, which flew open, exposing the stairs to the concrete landing below.

I grabbed Eva out of her chair and ran to my mother, the day impossible to grade now, off the scale. There'd never been a day this impossible to understand. The cool air from the basement rushed up the stairs like a grasping hand. I could already feel the way the flat cold slab would feel as we hit it, our soft bones no match for that monster.

"No!" I yelled, my eyes closed, the animal of my father hulking close, his breath fetid and sour; ripe and rich with the marsh, the bog, the jungle, the terrible place that he came from. The house tilted with each step, one, two, three. Closer and louder.

I wrapped my arms around my sister and my mother, pulling us to the linoleum. Glass crackled under my shoulders. Eva sobbed in my ear, her snot slick on my temple.

"Oh, no. Oh, no," my mother wailed. The blood from above her eye

smelled like the inside of a tin can, like yesterday and all the other days I'd breathed it in.

"No!" I looked the beast in the eye, the way the books said to do when it was too late. The way it happened was like a diagram I could work out later in my sister's big crayons. The shaggy, howling animal lunging toward us, tusks sharp and white and hard. My arm thrust out, extended, aimed for his heart, pushing back. A big foot slipping on orange juice or milk, the animal canting left, off balance, and then forward, my arm pushing it over us. Everything in my arm. Every bit of strength I'd imagined and practiced. I flexed at night on the bottom bunk, my sister May no longer on the top because she was sleeping elsewhere in her better life. It was up to me, and now, I used it, gritting my teeth. There. There, and then the beast lurched forward and then fell down, down the stairs.

The house rumbled its thanks, banging its gratitude on each step. In pain, the animal howled and then was silent. The concrete held up cold arms and grabbed. I felt my mother and sister hush, and then shallow breathing. None of us moved, all three of us waiting.

The man and woman are unaware of the soldiers as they sit on the banks of a favorite stream, dangling fingers in the water. Goggle eyes paint them green. Hidden by trees, yet only feet away, the intruders can see everything: the woman's hair, the man's beard, her lips, his eyes—and yet see nothing—miss the lives touching, each watching out for the other. The soldiers slip away, their presence undetected, leaving nothing but a spectral

he television draws an invisible veil across the scenes of carnage. The television can't smell the smoke or the scorched flesh. Thousands of miles away, spectators in their homes know that the worst that can happen is a temporary loss of appetite. There's no busted walls, no babies melting in their beds; The bomb drops are embroidered instead with something called "enemy combatants." Our man on the spot brags into his microphone. The background is blurred, with silent mouths and eyes just out of sight.

A body cannot go back, because what's done is done. Go hobble on one leg, because the memory of two won't support you. It's was a barbarous amputation, agreed. Femoral blood sprayed all over your uniform and my tense hands. You still can't forgive the stench. Some situations just don't make for cozy hospital beds, and a blade white hot in flame can be all the doctors on the planet.

had to sever a part to save the whole. No lulling the severity, the risk, of the operation. Your teeth ground with the terror of truth. A mind may wander, but a body is only ever in the moment. You're being fitted with a prosthetic; go and see how the future likes it.



Diane Payne / "One Day Soon"

The young woman rents the upstairs of a house, which means she gets two bedrooms and a bathroom. She buys a hot plate and three crockpots, tells her friends she's running a restaurant called the Underground Upstairs. They rarely pay with money, just booze. The landlord greets the woman with a garbage bag filled with empty beer and wine bottles.

"This is your last warning," he says. "No more alcohol. How can one woman drink so much? Get help!"

* * * * *

The man and his son get out of the car and head across the parking lot to the Montessori school. The door isn't shut properly, so the father walks a few steps to reclose the door. The young woman sees the

empty parking space, but not the man's son.

* * * * *

The young teacher drives her van down a mountain road, her van

filled with students. They're returning from a hike in the canyon. The student sitting in the front seat next to the teacher laughs, saying the teacher sings just like Janis Joplin. The brakes go out. The student asks if they'll be okay, and the

teacher nods her head while she stares down the curves. Finally, the brakes return. The next day, the mechanic at the school says he's been meaning to fix those brakes. "That must've been a hell of a ride!"

Daniel Loring Keating / "Her Name is Not"

She is languid enough for me to imagine creaking when she deigns to move. Her coat is aged and worn, roughened from continuous exposure to sunlight and rain. Her hair is greasy, hanging in strips and patches, swinging as she moves, each hair heavier at the bottom than elsewhere. She pushes a battered shopping cart along the park path, her yellow fingernails accented by the whiteness of the skin of her fingers gripping the handle. When she looks through me, I can tell she doesn't remember when I used to ride in the cart.

For a moment I think to reach out to her, to tell her about everything that has happened to me since the day I last saw her. I could tell her everything—I could tell her about the young couple that took me in and gave me a roof. I could tell her about



Ashli Florini. Abandonment. (2016) Digital Photograph.

going to college. I could tell her about times I thought I was in love and times I actually was. I could ask her if she is my mother.

Instead, I watch as she pushes her cart past me, circling perpetually to nowhere. I look down at myself, at the clothes I purchased at a store she has probably never been inside, with more money than she has likely had in her possession in years. She is going nowhere; I not only am going "somewhere," I have already gone somewhere, and even if I wanted to try and bridge the gap that now exists between us, it would do her no good.

I turn around, and she is gone.

William Doreski / "From the Brink of Extinction" (Plan for the House)

Framing a space instead of a thing is a good idea. You can affix something complex, a view, an attitude, simply with hammer and nails. Use galvanized hardware and two-by-six clear pine. Knotholes would weaken the space and admit more distance than the fresh air can withstand. I'm especially eager to frame a lake scene, complete with dead fish bobbing in the chop and a loon laughing from the brink of extinction. Here you are with your tool belt, your expensive molybdenum framing hammer, your T-square to keep every joint honest, no crooked houses in your future. No house at all: only this carefully framed space grinning like a kid at the prom.

The lake sighs. Maybe it's in love. Maybe in love with the loon or the rotting carp or the canoe adrift in the shallows with no one aboard. Can you catch this entire scene? Can



Fabrice Poussin. A House Once. Digital photograph.

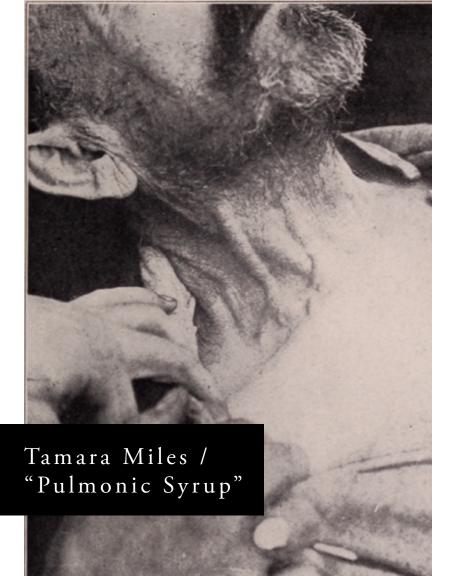
you, like Walt Whitman, frame it so precisely that the rest of us can trace foreground, middle distance, and skyline, exact like some grisly Old Master obsessed with perfection? I know you can do it because you believe the lake's silver-gray love could spread widely enough to drown us all in the medium we deserve.

You are digging in the garden. You are digging up weeds, unearthing bulbs to embarrass them, finding bronze and silver Roman coins. When you show them to me, I say that I hadn't realized that New Hampshire had been part of the Roman Empire. Further sifting the soil, you expose doubloons buried by inland pirates. I admire their crude tattoos, their scars and tricorn hats, their carcasses swinging from gallows on the Thames or at the mouth of the Seine.

You dig and dig and discover one corner of a buried auto, a Studebaker from the late Forties. I recognize that blunt fender, the hood ornament, the grill. You suspect someone buried murder victims in this car, so shouldn't I report the crime? No, I can see there's no one inside, no skeleton seated at the wheel. You expose the whole thing with your favorite garden spade, and I climb inside the decaying corpse. The key shines in the ignition. I turn it, press the starter button, and the engine roars. A gust of blue exhaust, a couple of backfires, and I drive the thing out of its grave.

Sure, the paint is scabby and the upholstery reeks of mice and moles, but let's drive to town and see if the cops notice how unregistered we are. They could arrest us, but maybe instead they'll cheer and wave their pistols. Maybe hearing the commotion, the priest will scurry into the street to bless us. Maybe then we

can inspire the whole village to resurrect itself according to familiar laws of physics, laws that we all can endorse.



John started his days at the Walsh County poor farm like the other residents, with a breakfast of biscuits and eggs and a dose of Dr. Schenk's Pulmonic Syrup. Among his companions at the table were others, like him, who were old and unable to find work, as well as more deeply troubled petty criminals and others who couldn't get along on their own. Occasionally, there were women and children left penniless by a husband who had died or left some other way. John's own wife hadn't lived long after he had stood before the judge, down to his last ten dollars, and admitted he was a pauper in need of mercy from the state of North Dakota and from the county. The humiliation still made his shoulders ache.

"I'm 72," he had said in court, "a shoemaker." The judge asked when he had migrated from Ireland. "I was 50 then, sir, and better able to put in a long day's work, to go out and find clients." At that, he went into a coughing fit so obviously consumptive that the judge had said he would have a place here at the farm with the other indigents. It was 1910. Twenty-seven souls now shared his breakfast table: twenty-three men, three women, seven native, twenty foreign born, and one colored. Three others had died this year.

"Good morning, John," the superintendent said as the Irishman shuffled to the table and sat down next to a sixty-nine-year-old Scottish tailor named James, who nodded, and a Norwegian man of forty-seven, the newest addition. Unlike John, both James and Abe the Norwegian could read and write, and he depended on them to share whatever they saw in the newspaper that was delivered two mornings a week. Occasionally, James would also read passages of the Bible,

and on this day, John recognized the music of the Psalms: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." He smiled at this because he knew that the pulmonic syrup contained hyssop, the holy herb native to southern Europe, along with ginger, thyme, and pepper. Together, they granted a touch of mild mint flavor.

The superintendent gave him a hot cup of coffee. Mrs. Mary Farlow believed that the pulmonic syrup was a cure for not only diseases of the lung, but for wasting of any kind, plus fatigue, malaise, liver complaints, and depression, all common there. The wretched suffering of some of the inmates—what they were commonly called—was nearly unbearable to observe, and on this day the Irishman was in low spirits. No family remained for him. He had no children. It was for the best, he thought, again, for he would have had to bring them here, to the farm in Park River, where he would die.

He put out his tongue for the spoon Mary held out to him. "Purge me with hyssop," he repeated, and she too smiled. He knew he was to some degree a lucky man to have ended up here. He had heard of poor farms where there was contaminated water, dirty bedding, and vermin. He had heard of cruelties, of people sleeping on the floor, people without medical care. He shuddered when he recalled the fate of some women who could not defend themselves, and turned his mind to happier memories, of when he was a boy in Ireland, and the lilting music that had filled his days:

Come all ye young travelers

Come along with me

We'll sing a song all day long

Ora-diddle-la-diddle-la-dee

He swallowed the syrup down and opened his mouth to sing softly, "Ora-diddle-la-diddle-la dee, ora-diddle-la-diddle-la-dee," and was astonished when James began to cry at the beauty of it. "Go on," said his friend. "Go on, John," and so he sang,

Flap your arms young traveler

Fly away with me

We'll flap our arms one-two-three

Ora-diddle-la-diddle-la-dee

And James pretended he was a bird, and so did Abe, and soon the whole table was filled with birds, ora-diddle-la-diddle-la-dee, and the poor farm inmates closed their eyes. "Ora-diddle-la-diddle-la dee," John sang from his aching lungs, and flew, at last, away.

Poesía

in the expanded field

Yemaya—

dear Mother

Whose Children are the Fish—

Take

this cake, sweet

as caña, sugar

spun from

soil. Receive

these coins of earthen

cacao and swallow

silken blossoms,

fallen

from knotted branches. Savor

the star-studded papaya

swollen

with sunshine

and summer

rain.

And protect us,



dear Mother,

from angry

waters that crawl

beneath wooden doorframes,

wishing

to reclaim

this land

we wish

was ours.

We have been rootless too

long.





The first child born in an aircraft occurred over Miami in 1929. No one, however, will tell you what occurred under Miami in 1929. But I will. A man and two women dug a deep ditch and then started tunneling. Every five feet they placed 2x4s on the sides to support the weight. I have tried to calculate the weight per square foot of earth but I cannot. They excavated the tunnel another 30 feet per day. This is not a math problem. The problem is that now, 85 years later, they are still tunneling. The man must be 110 years old, the women slightly younger. They dig, fill a wheelbarrow, push it back along the length of the tunnel to the neighborhood where the entrance is. They fill the back of a pickup truck. The pickup truck is driven by a 108 year old man who has been buying a new pickup truck every ten years. The pickup truck brings it to the port where the cruise ships dock and loads it onto a small boat which is then supposed to bring it to a secret location. But the original captain died years ago and the newest captain does not know where the secret location is. So instead, he sails beyond the view of land, fills hundreds of tiny bags with the dirt, attaches them to helium filled balloons and lets his niece release them into the sky. Because of science all of these bags converge and have created a floating island perhaps 100 miles offshore, 9 miles in the sky. The captain does not know this, but the man and the women in the tunnel suspect that is where they will go when they die.



John Findura / "Under Miami"

Lauren Davis / "Vulvodynia"

What church boasts a door unyielding to the devout? More than a barrier to the cold, it must unbolt. I remember

when they pinpointed my body's faulty piece—my vulva's vestibule. Same name for the opening to a church, you recalled.

But you're refused your seat of worship, singing hymns in the snow. Inside, the incense and sanctity go stale. Can a building grieve?

I am grieving, needing to bless and be blessed, the Church refusing the will of its Lord.

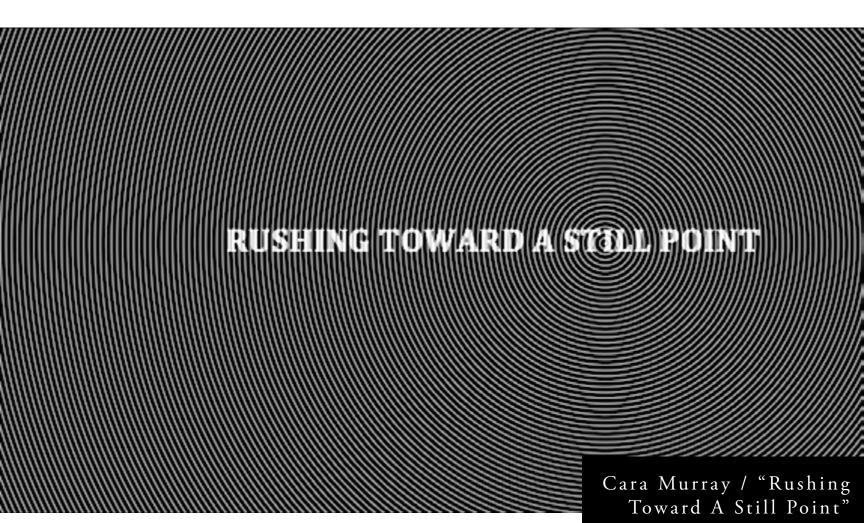


Ojo Taiye /"Hashtag"

learn to use free verse to write depressions feint in uppercase poems use wood to tell the world how you left a shell in the backyard and walk into the sun how a river became a song in the back larynx of a migratory bird whose flight ends on lonely hills how the smell of bristles in a black robe becomes a fish rite in the nostrils of an elephant how your name is clothed with the peregrine of a possessed woman lost in the maze of mottled rainbows.







Cara Murray / "The Thing with Merit" Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies! Trump! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies! Trump It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Trump! Click Here! nickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies! Trump 'It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Trump! Click Here Satisfies! Trump! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here the thing it Tru with merit I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies in' It! may be buried re! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Trump! Company of the Compa Satis in the bowels s! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfie in' It! but that which is ers S ere! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Trump o! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! C obscured Satis holds the most ers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! Snicke a! I'm resonance It! Click Here! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin Here! after the rain p! Snickers Satisfies! I'm Lovin' It! Click Here! 🕄 rump Spickers Satisfied

As seen in recent email subject lines:

Don't reach for other Peoples Children (?) how to talk to little girls always use the Buckles and Child Restraints we don't dare Though We Should

Gravity is Your Father

Seeking Alpha: Houston, We Have a Problem

[Free ebook] You have no idea what you can get away with Top kids' Halloween costumes! Delivered to you door?

Bones: Sugar v. Honey

we can make this right: the Total Kid Solution brought to you be your friend, ABC Mouse Do High Schoolers Hate You?

Surface Protection For _____ (you'll be pleasurably surprised) get on the phone with you're future – call our psychic's today!

they are interpolated by billboards:

Love Your Mom? Save Big On Flowers!

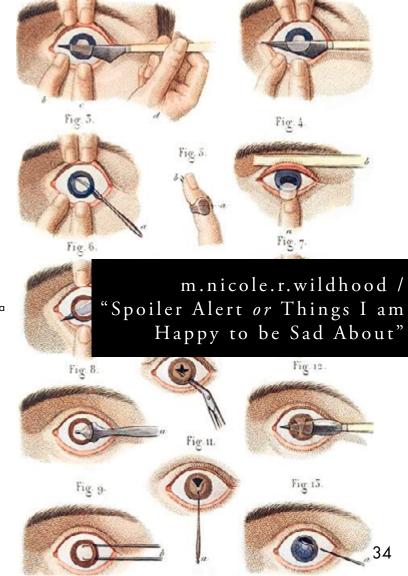
You Are a Force of Nature. Unleash That Potential With Nissan's Latest Offering.
Your Calling is Calling. Answer It [picture of a chef with balloons tied around his waist]
"Banish Aging From Your Being" [in a thought bubble above a flawless face looking down at a pile of thick, wrinkled flesh-colored lines]
Make up time by getting more out of the amount you have left [picture of a hang glider in the

Make up time by getting more out of the amount you have left [picture of a hang glider in the background]

Atomic: building block or annihilator. Your choice [off to the right of the black block letters, a person with arms spread, hands splayed, long-ish bleached hair spiked in mid-scream]
Time Runs Consecutively. Best to Go With It [picture of a runner's shoes from underneath]

woven in, at the bank, the grocery store, the work, the play, the home:

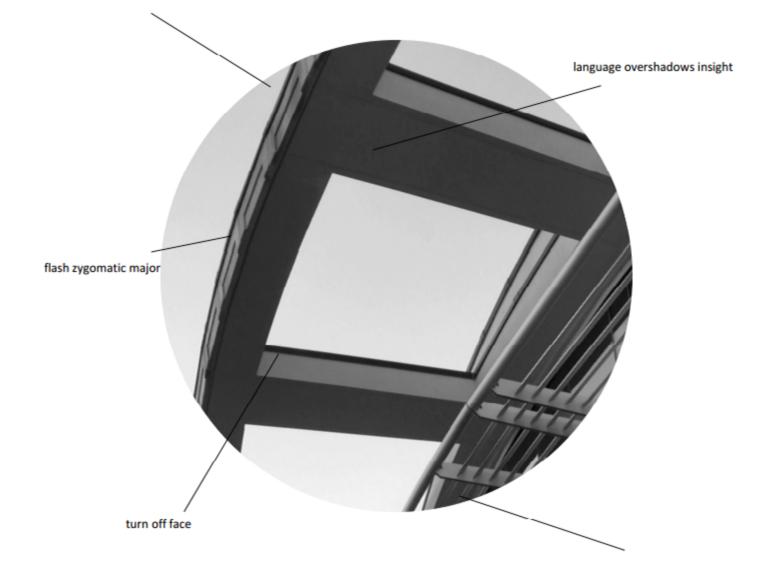
hello, how are you? hello, how are you? hello, how are you? hello how are you? how are you? how are you how are you are you

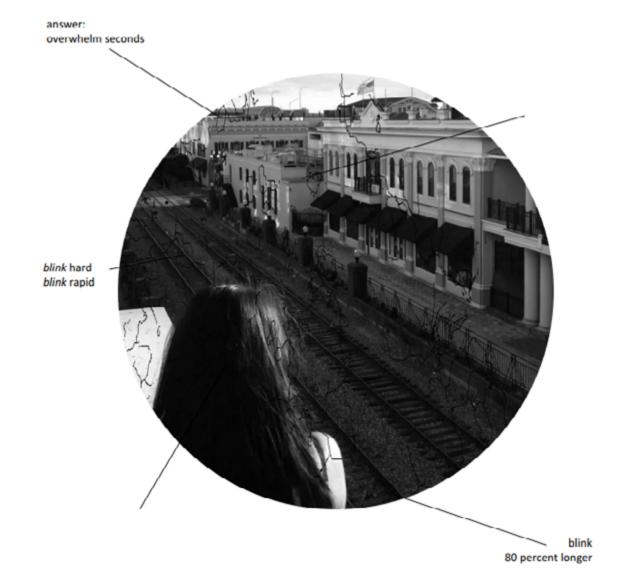


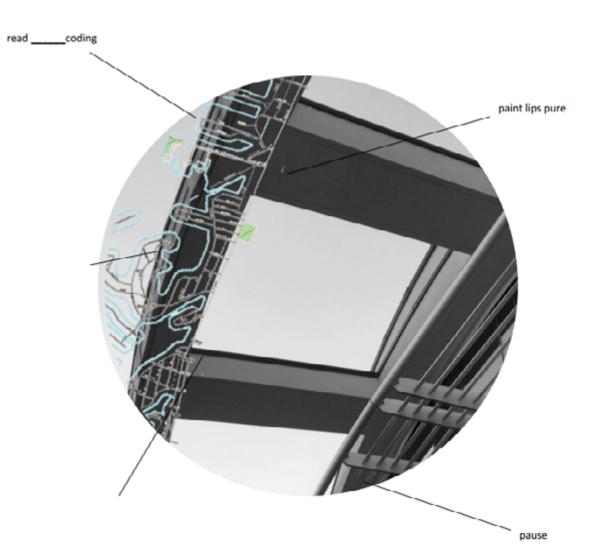
a bad case of conclusion

Riley Woods /
"A Bad Case of
Conclusion"

a solid her







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velvet- leaf.
                                                                                                                                        common varrow.
                                                                                                                                        Japanese chaff flow-
                                                                                                                                         er, corn cockle, red-
                                                                                                                                     creeping bentgrass, tree-of-heaven,
                                                                                                                                                                                                mi-
                                                                                                                       mosa, garlic mustard, wild garlic, redroot pigweed, common
                                                                                                                                                                                          ragweed,
                                                                                                                        annual ragweed, stinking chamomile, sweet vernalgrass, common burdock,
                                                                                                                       thymeleaf sandwort, tall oatgrass, annual wormwood, mugwort, small carpetgrass,
                                                                                                                   yellow rocket, Japanese barberry, rapeseed, black mustard, field brome, smooth brome,
                                                                                                                 bald brome, rye brome, cheatgrass, paper-mulberry, corn gromwell, hare's ear, hedge bind-
                                                                                                            weed, hedge false bindweed, marijuana, shepherd's-purse, musk thistle, plumeless thistle, oriental
                                                                                            bit-
                                                                                                          tersweet, bittersweets, spotted knapweed, common mouse-ear, chickweed, big chickweed, sticky
                                                                                          chick-
                                                                                                         weed, dwarf snapdragon, lambsquarters, chicory, Canada thistle, field thistle, bull thistle, sweet autumn
                                                                                        bower, Asiatic dayflower, poison-hemlock, doubtful knight's-spur, field bindweed, piedmont bedstraw, bermudagrass, rice
                                              flatsedge, orchard-
                                                                          grass, jim-sonweed, Queen Anne's lace, Deptford pink, smooth crabgrass, large crabgrass, violet crabgrass, Chinese yam, non-native
                                            yams, common teasel, teasel, spring whitlowgrass, Indian mock-strawberry, mexicantea, barnyardgrass, common viper's bugloss, Russian olive, Elaeagnus, autumn olive,
                                         goosegrass, quackgrass, stinkgrass, bushy wallflower, winged burning bush, winter creeper, toothed spurge, wild buckwheat, Japanese knotweed, tall fescue, Italian ryegrass,
                                         meadow fescue, hairy galinsoga, longstalk cranesbill, ground ivy, English ivy, tawny daylily, dames rocket, common velvetgrass, Japanese hop, common St. Johnswort, red morn-
                                           ingglory, ivyleaf morningglory, tall morningglory, vellow iris, Kummerowia, Korean lespedeza, common lespedeza, willowleaf lettuce, prickly lettuce, henbit, purple deadnettle,
                                    everlasting peavine, motherwort, field pepperweed, shrubby lespedeza, sericea lespedeza, oxeye daisy, Chinese privet, privet, European privet, yellow toadflax, perennial ryegrass, Jap-
                                anese honeysuckle, Amur honeysuckle, bush honeysuckles, bird, foot trefoil, scarlet pimpernel, creeping yellow loosestrife, purple loosestrife, paradise apple, common mallow, white
                              horehound, pineapple-weed, black medic, yellow sweet-clover, Japanese stiltgrass, thoroughwort pennycress, Chinese silvergrass, white mulberry, miniature beefsteak-plant, com-
                                  grape hyacinth, Eurasian water-milfoil, brittleleaf naiad, daffodil, watercress, catnip, apple-of-Peru, star-of-Bethlehem, dallisgrass, wild parsnip, princesstree, perilla mint,
            Oriental lady's thumb, ladysthumb, reed canarygrass, timothy, European common reed, buckhorn plantain, annual bluegrass, Canada bluegrass, roughstalk bluegrass, prostrate knotweed, black
           bindweed, Oriental lady's thumb, white poplar, common purslane, curly-leaved pondweed, sulfur cinquefoil, Mahaleb cherry, kudzu, bulbous buttercup, creeping buttercup, bristly locust, yell-
            ow fieldcress, dog rose, multiflora rose, memorial rose, wine raspberry, red sorrel, curly dock, broadleaf dock, white willow, weeping willow, bouncingbet, purple crownvetch, giant fox-
           tail, yellow foxtail, bristlegrass, green foxtail, green bristlegrass, white campion, bladder campion, hedge mustard, spiny sowthistle, annual sowthistle, sorghum, johnsongrass, com-
         mon chickweed, common tansy, common dandelion, field pennycress, spreading hedgeparsley, western salsify, rabbitfoot clover, large hop clover, small hop clover, alsike clover, red
           clover, white clover, coltsfoot, narrow-leaved cattail, common cornsalad, moth mullein, common mullein, corn speedwell, ivyleaf speedwell, common speedwell, thyme-
leaf speedwell, common vetch, garden vetch,
hairy vetch, common periwinkle, wisterias
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Travis MacDonald / "Kentucky" from Concrete Jungle

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vel-
                                                               vet-
                                                               leaf,
                                                              com-
                                                               mon
                                                               var-
                                                               row.
                                                               corn
                                                            cockle.
                                                            redtop.
                                                            tree-of-
                                                           heaven,
                                                         silver hair-
                                                       grass, mimo-
                                                        sa, garlic mustard, wild garlic, common rag-
                                                        weed, corn chamomile, sweet vernalgrass, com-
                                                                                                                         mon
                                                                                                                                           burdock.
                                                    thymeleaf sandwort, tall oatgrass, mugwort, joint-
                                                                                                                         head
                                                                                                                                      grass, vellow rocket.
                                                   Japanese barberry, birdsrape mustard, field brome.
                                                                                                                       smooth brome, bald brome, poverty
                                                brome, cheatgrass, paper-mulberry, corn gromwell,
                                                                                                               hedge bindweed, shep- herd's-purse, spiny
                                             less thistle, musk thistle, plumeless thistle, oriental bitter-
                                                                                                              sweet, bittersweets, corn-
                                                                                                                                             flower, spotted
                                  knapweed, common mouse-ear chickweed, big chickweed, sticky
                                                                                                           chickweed, greater celandine,
                                                                                                                                              lambsquarters,
                              chicory, Canada thistle, field thistle, bull thistle, sweet autumn virgins- bower, Asiatic dayflower, poison-
                                                                                                                                                   hemlock,
                           doubtful knight's-spur, field bindweed, piedmont bedstraw, bermudagrass, rice flatsedge, Scotch broom, orchard-
                                                                                                                                                     grass,
                            jimsonweed, Queen Anne's lace, Deptford pink, smooth crabgrass, large crabgrass, Chinese yam, common
                         teasel, teasel, spring whitlowgrass, Indian mock-strawberry, mexicantea, barnyardgrass, common viper's bug-
                            Elaeagnus, autumn olive, goosegrass, quackgrass, stinkgrass, weeping lovegrass, redstem filaree, redstem
                 loss.
                stork's bill, cypress spurge, toothed spurge, wild buckwheat, Japanese knotweed, meadow fescue, hairy galinsoga,
               smooth bedstraw, longstalk cranesbill, ground ivy, English ivy, tawny daylily, dames rocket, Venice mallow,
             meadow hawkweed, mouseear hawkweed, common velvetgrass, Japanese hop, common St. Johnswort, hairy
              cat's ear, red morningglory, ivyleaf morningglory, tall morningglory, Kummerowia, Korean lespedeza,
              common lespedeza, prickly lettuce, henbit, purple deadnettle, everlasting peavine, motherwort, field
              pepperweed, shrubby lespedeza, sericea lespedeza, oxeve daisy. Chinese privet, privet, vellow toad-
          flax, perennial ryegrass. Japanese honeysuckle, bush honeysuckles, scarlet pimpernel.
                                                                                                  creeping Jen-
          ney, purple loosestrife, paradise apple, common mallow, pineapple-weed, black medic,
                                                                                                     vellow
      sweet-clover, Japanese stiltgrass, thoroughwort pennycress, Chinese silvergrass, white mul-
                                                                                                      berry.
marsh dayflower, starch grape hyacinth, watercress, catnip, star-of-Bethlehem, dallisgrass, wild
 parsnip, princesstree, perilla mint, ladysthumb, reed canarygrass, timothy, European com-
mon reed, buckhorn plantain, annual bluegrass, Canada bluegrass, roughstalk bluegrass,
prostrate knotweed, marshpepper smartweed, Oriental lady's thumb, white poplar, com-
mon purslane, sulfur cinquefoil, kudzu, bulbous buttercup, wild radish, bristly locust,
   multiflora rose, wine raspberry, red sorrel, curly dock, broadleaf dock, Wisconsin
     weeping willow, bouncingbet, purple crown-vetch, giant foxtail, yellow foxtail,
    bristlegrass, green foxtail, green bristlegrass, field madder, white campion,
       bladder campion, hedge mustard, bittersweet nightshade, spiny sowthistle,
        johnsongrass, little starwort, common chickweed, common dandelion,
         field pennycress, western salsify, rabbitfoot clover, hop clover, large
           hop clover, small hop clover, alsike clover, red clover, white clover,
               coltsfoot, narrow-leaved cattail, common cornsalad, moth mul-
                     lein, common mullein, corn speedwell, ivyleaf speed-
                    well, common speedwell, thymeleaf speedwell, com-
                      mon vetch, hairy vetch, big peri- winkle.
                        common periwinkle, periwinkle.
                         rattail fescue, wist-
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erias

Travis MacDonald / "Tennessee" from Concrete Jungle

spiraea, common chickweed, common dandelion, field pennycress, spreading hedgeparsley, western salsify, large hop clover, small hop clover, alsike clover, red clover, white clover, common wheat, coltsfoot, narrow-leaved cattail, common cornsalad, moth mullein, common mullein, corn speedwell, ivyleaf speedwell, common speedwell, thymeleaf speedwell, common vetch, garden vetch, hairy vetch, big periwinkle, common periwinkle, periwinkle, rattail fescue, wisterias

velvetleaf, common yarrow, jointed goatgrass, corn cockle, redtop, creeping bentgrass, tree-of-heaven, mimosa, garlic mustard, wild garlic, alligatorweed, common ragweed, corn chamomile, stinking chamomile, sweet vernalgrass, common burdock, thymeleaf sandwort, annual wormwood, joint-head grass, giant reed, yellow rocket, Japanese barberry, Indian mustard, birdsrape mustard, field brome, smooth brome, bald brome, poverty brome, cheatgrass, paper-mulberry, corn gromwell, hare's ear, hedge bindweed, smallseed falseflax, shepherd's-purse, balloonvine, musk thistle, plumeless thistle, Chinese chestnut, oriental bittersweet, bittersweets, comflower, spotted knapweed, common mouse-ear chickweed, sticky chickweed, dwarf snapdragon, lambsquarters, chicory, Canada thistle, field thistle, bull thistle, sweet autumn virginsbower, Asiatic dayflower, poison-hemlock, doubtful knight's-spur, field bindweed, piedmont bedstraw, bermudagrass, rice flatsedge, purple nutsedge, orchardgrass, ijmsonweed, Queen Anne's lace, Deptford pink, smooth crabgrass, large crabgrass, Chinese yam, non-native yams, common teasel, teasel, spring whitlowgrass, Indian mock-strawberry, mexicantea, junglerice, barnyardgrass, common viper's bugloss, thorny olive, Elaeagnus, autumn olive, goosegrass, quackgrass, stinkgrass, weeping lovegrass, redstem filaree, bushy wallflower, winged burning bush, winter creeper, cypress spurge, toothed spurge, buckwheat, wild buckwheat, Japanese knotweed, tall fescue. Italian ryegrass, meadow fescue, hairy galinsoga, cutleaf geranium, ground ivy, English ivy, tawny daylily, dames rocket, rose of Sharon, common velvetgrass, common St. Johnswort, hairy cat's ear, red morningglory, ivyleaf morningglory, tall morningglory, yellow iris, Kummerowia, Korean lespedeza, common lespedeza, willowleaf lettuce, prickly lettuce, henbit, purple deadnettle, everlasting peavine, motherwort, field pepperweed, shrubby lespedeza, oxeye daisy, Chinese privet, privet, European privet, yellow toadflax, perennial ryegrass, Japanese honeysuckle, Amur honeysuckle, bush honeysuckles, birdsfoot trefoil, scarlet pimpernel, creeping Jenney, purple loosestrife, paradise apple, common mallow, white horehound, black medic, yellow sweet-clover, Japanese stiltgrass, thoroughwort pennycress, Chinese silvergrass, white mulberry, miniature beefsteakplant, marsh dayflower, starch grape hyacinth, parrotfeather, Eurasian water-milfoil, brittleleaf naiad, sacred bamboo, watercress, catnip, apple-of-Peru, starof-Bethlehem, dallisgrass, wild parsnip, princesstree, perilla mint, Oriental lady's thumb, ladysthumb, reed canarygrass, timothy, buckhorn plantain, annual bluegrass, Canada bluegrass, prostrate knotweed, black bindweed, marshpepper smartweed, white poplar, common purslane, curly-leaved pondweed, sulfur cinquefoil, kudzu, Callery pear, bulbous buttercup, bristly locust, multiflora rose, Himalayan blackberry, wine raspberry, red sorrel, curly dock, broadleaf dock, Wisconsin weeping willow, weeping willow, bouncing bet, cereal rve, purple crown-vetch, giant foxtail, foxtail millet, vellow foxtail, bristlegrass, green foxtail, field madder, white campion, bladder campion, hedge mustard, tropical soda apple, spiny sowthistle, sorghum, johnsongrass, Japanese spiraea, fortune meadowsweet, bridalwreath

velvetleaf. common varrow. corn cockle, red- top, treeof-heaven, silver hairgrass, mimosa, garlic mustard, wild garlic, common ragweed, corn chamomile, sweet vernalgrass, com- mon burdock, thymeleaf sandwort, tall oatgrass, mugwort, joint-head grass, yellow rocket, Japanese barberry, birdsrape mustard, field brome, smooth brome, bald brome, poverty brome, cheatgrass, paper-mulberry, gromwell, hedge bindweed, shepherd's-purse, spiny corn plumeless thistle, musk thistle, plumeless thistle, oriental bittersweet, bittersweets, cornflower, spotted knapweed, common mouse-ear chickweed, big chickweed, sticky chickweed, greater celandine, lambsquarters, chicory, Canada Peechel com
Winkle, com, which com
Winkle, com, why vech, big pen
Winkle, man feece, big pen;
Western com, who pen
Western com, who pen;
Western com, who pen;
Western com, who pen; thistle, field thistle, bull thistle, sweet autumn virginsbower, Asiatic dayflower, poison-hemlock, doubtful knight's-spur, field bindweed, piedmont bedstraw, bermudagrass, rice flatsedge, Scotch broom, orchardgrass, jimsonweed, Queen Anne's lace, Deptford pink, smooth crabgrass, large crabgrass, Chinese yam, common teasel, teasel, spring whitlowgrass, Indian mock-strawberry, mexicantea, barnyardgrass, common viper's bugloss, Elaeagnus, autumn olive, goosegrass, quackgrass, stinkgrass, weeping lovegrass, redstem filaree, redstem stork's bill, cypress spurge, toothed spurge, wild buckwheat, Japanese knotweed, meadow fescue, hairy galinsoga, smooth bedstraw, longstalk cranesbill, ground ivy, English ivy, tawny daylily, dames rocket, Venice mallow, meadow hawkweed, mouseear hawkweed, common velvetgrass. hop, common St. Johnswort, hairy cat's ear, red morningglory, ivyleaf morningglory, tall morningglory, Kummerowia, eza, common lespedeza, prickly lettuce, henbit, purple deadnettle, everlasting peavine, motherwort, field pepperweed, shrub-by lespedeza, sericea lespedeza, oxeye daisy, Chinese privet, privet, yellow toadflax, perennial ryegrass, Japanese honeysuckle, bush honeysuckles, scarlet pimpernel, creeping Jenney, purple loosestrife, paradise apple, common mallow, pineapple-weed, black medic, yellow sweet-clover, Japanese stiltgrass, thoroughwort pennycress, Chinese silvergrass, white mulberry, marsh dayflower, starch grape hyacinth, watercress, catnip, star-of-Bethlehem, dallisgrass, wild parsnip, princesstree, perilla mint, ladysreed canarygrass, timothy, European common reed, buckhorn plantain, annual bluegrass, Canada bluegrass, roughstalk bluegrass, prostrate knotweed, marshpepper smartweed, Oriental lady's thumb, white poplar, common purslane, sulfur cinquefoil, kudzu, bulbous buttercup, wild radish, bristly locust, multiflora rose, wine raspberry, red sorrel, curly dock, broadleaf dock, Wisconsin weeping willow, bouncingbet, purple crown-vetch, giant foxtail, yellow foxtail, bristlegrass, green foxtail, green bristlegrass, field madder, white campion, bladder campion,

Japan-

ped-

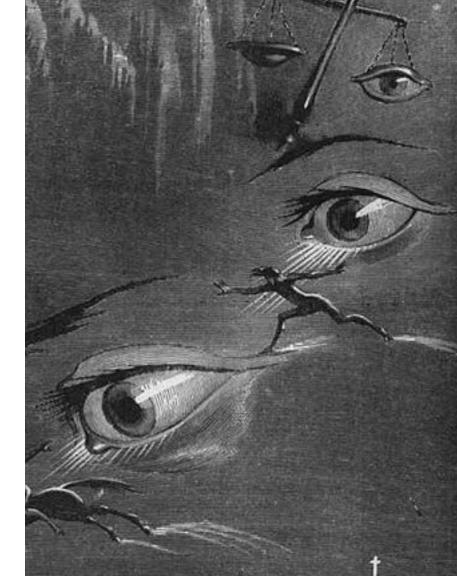
hedge mustard, bittersweet nightshade, spiny sowthistle, johnsongrass, little starwort, common chickweed, common dandelion, field pennycress, western salsify, rabbitfoot clover, hop clover, large hop clover, small hop clover, alsike clover, red clover, white clover, coltsfoot, narrow-leaved cattail, common cornsalad, moth mullein, common mullein, corn speedwell, ivyleaf speedwell, common speedwell, thymeleaf

Korean les-

Travis MacDonald / "Virginia" from Concrete Jungle

Eric Parker / "Insomnia in South America"

No puedo dormir.
I have caught the disease of insomnia once more, the disease of lost memory, the disease of an unwritten future, so I walk the streets of Santiago, mumbling The Captain's Verses, dreaming of love and loss and the wind, the mountains, the sea, being everywhere but where I should be: here in my bed. Please wake me to sleep so I can take my sleeping slow.





Postmortem Photo #1 – Black Power pick and folded paper plucked from pocket inside out, tossed aside.

<Make him inhuman>

Postmortem Photo #2 – Green football helmet twisted almost off his head by buckshot.

Postmortem Photo #3 – Empty hands splayed and T-shirt pulled up to show belly flesh.

<Plant this sword beneath his stiff fingers>

Postmortem Photo #5 – Lay a dull needle on a worn record, spin it unevenly with your worthless, clumsy fingers.

Paul David Adkins / "Attica Prison Rebellion, September 13th, 1971: Trying to Wrap My Head Around the Thought of Weaver the Weatherman, WTVJ-Miami, Not Being a Member of The Weather Underground"

Does this man know where Bernardine Dohrn is hiding? Is he the reason thunder rumbles every summer afternoon?

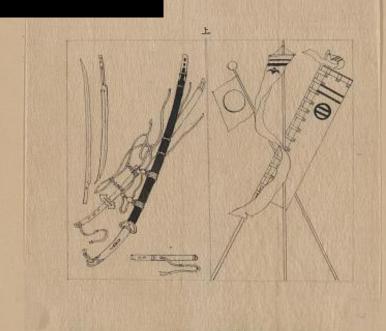
He looks so nice in his tie. He smiles, even as the storms roll off the 'Glades to fill our roads with rivers.

He calls the rainstorms storms. He says it like it is.

Someone should call the police.

Someone needs to know he's right there, on the tube, right now.

Someone needs to not be afraid.



C. L. Bledsoe & Michael Gushue / "Fucking Happiness Man"



This is what happens behind the postcards: you, happy as soup in a can, understanding nothing, the luggage crawled under our bed, a wounded dog. And this one, of the world's largest yam, the twine unraveled from between us and sitting in a shed outside of Duluth. Behind that wagon is where I've hidden the evidence, but I'll sell you a ticket. It's a chance to win Driving Under the Influence. Look at this one of colorful breakdown lanes: a key caked with dirt, something flat, no longer alive, a deflated bottle, trash to build into that panorama we could take a picture of and put on a postcard captioned, "Postcard." In a drawer somewhere, the agricultural bulletin you coveted for the cleanness of its boredom. Behind this cloverleaf. its swollen civic hubris, so boring and desolate. Our quote level sinks low in the barrel. You can't barely reach it, just the tips of your fingers do. You, content as autocorrect in a ream of traffic alerts, go on.

THAN KYO U

Many people have helped pave the way for the success of Obra/Artifact. Terri Witek and Mark Powell, who created the MFA program, are first among them. Mark and Terri not only shaped our lives as undergraduates, teaching us how to experience life and literature for all of their beautiful strangeness, they also supported our dreams.

The idea for Obra/Artifact came about on an art excursion led by Cyriaco Lopes in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Cyriaco listened to our fantasies and guided us in O/A's first nascent phases. Integral, too, is Chantel Acevedo. On the harrowing drive from SMA back to the Mexico City Airport, it was Chantel encouraged us to make our print version postcards.

Most of all, we have to thank Juan Reyes, MFAOTA's interim director, without whose support, organization, encouragement, and math skills, O/A would not not have been possible.

We would also like to thank all of the faculty and visiting artists from whom we drew so much inspiration: Jena Osman, Urayoán Noel, Michal Lemberger, Tracie Morris, Jessica Lee Richardson, Jeffrey Renard Allen, Matt Roberts, Laura Mullen, Ronaldo Wilson, Liz Elliot, Edwidge Danticat, John Warley, Francisco Goldman, Rodrigo Toscano, Julia Elliot, and Patricia Engel.

And last but not least, thank you to all of our contributing authors and artists. Without your talent, these pages would hold no meaning.

Thank you for all of your support.

Rebecca Renner, Jared Smith, and Lucianna Chixaro Ramos The Editors

COVER

unsplash.com - Photo manipulation by Rebecca Renner

ESSAIS

Islander Ashore: https://goo.gl/tVuJyC Hand Me Down Death: https://goo.gl/uUlOLy

Thailand (A Surrealist Mural): https://goo.gl/o9vHsM, unsplash.com

Honorarium Selachimorpha: author provided photos

IMAGINAÇÃO

Dirty Diapers: https://goo.gl/42Rtkw

Force Play: https://goo.gl/Ys4O13

Hunting: Ashli Fiorini was born in Honolulu, Hawaii. She received her BFA in Fine Art Photography at Syracuse University. She currently lives in Syracuse, NY with an elderly, technology-destroying cat.

Goggle Eyes: https://www.nsa.gov/resources/everyone/digital-me-

dia-center/image-galleries/places/

One Day Soon: https://goo.gl/jFdwlv

Her Name Is Not: See description for "Hunting."

Brink of Extinction: Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Short- Lucianna Chixaro Ramos er University, Rome, Georgia. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and more than two dozens other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review and more than seventy other publications.

Pulmonic Syrup: https://goo.gl/bL5JAQ

POESÍA

Under Miami: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ ggb2006002392/

Vulvodynia: Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University, Rome, Georgia. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and more than two dozens other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review and more than seventy other publications.

Hashtag: https://unsplash.com/search/bird?photo=liigOto_Dw8

Rushing To a Still Point / The Thing With Merit: Cara Murray's poetry is included in the edited collection "Systemic Crises of Global Climate Change: Intersections of race, class and gender" (Routledge, 2016), has appeared in Platte Valley Review, and is forthcoming in Otoliths and shufPoetry.

Spoiler Alert: https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/wp-content/ uploads/2015/10/cataract.jpg

Insomnia In South America: https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/ illustrations/time-zone-watch/

Paul David Atkins, 2 Poems: http://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/ highsm/29500/29546v.jpg,

LAYOUT & DESIGN



